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THE OPIUM ABOLITION QUESTION

By J. O. P. Bland, formerly of the Imperial Maritime Customs, Secretary to the Shanghai Municipality and "Times" Correspondent in China

I am deeply sensible, ladies and gentlemen, of the honor conferred and of my privilege in addressing so distinguished and representative an audience. I am also sensible of the fact that the opinions which I am about to lay before you in connection with the opium question in China are very different, on the whole, from those which you are accustomed to hear and to hold. The subject of opium production and smoking in China is one which many writers have discovered to be of an extremely difficult and thorny nature. Mr. H. B. Morse, an American who for many years served the Chinese government loyally and well, writing on this subject observes that he who tries to investigate the facts with no predisposition to either side is likely to find himself branded as a trimmer by the one party and a Laodicean by the other, with no opportunity to defend himself.

In bringing before you the present aspect of the opium question and the views and opinions which I and many other observers hold on this subject, I would ask you to believe that I am actuated by a feeling of sincere sympathy and regard for the Chinese people and that the views which I hold are entirely sincere, even where they differ from those advanced by the missionary bodies, the anti-opium societies and many earnest Chinese reformers in China. I am aware that one runs the risk of being misjudged in this matter, but it is a risk which must be faced by those who sincerely believe that the proceedings of the anti-opium societies, initiated with the very best of motives, are likely in the long run to aggravate the evil of opium smoking in China, even after the Indian trade has been completely abolished, and to a certain extent because of the abolition of that trade.

Speaking for myself and for many other observers whose opinions are based as much upon the political, economic and social aspects of the question as upon its high moral grounds, it seems to me a matter for sincere congratulation that Great Britain has assented to the abolition of the Indian trade, a traffic in itself highly demoralizing to the Chinese and therefore discreditable to Great Britain. Having said this much, however, it seems to me necessary that we should recognize the fact that the practical issues of the question of opium abolition as a whole have been very frequently confused by too general an acceptance of certain postulates loudly proclaimed upon high moral grounds. It seems to me that many of the philanthropists, missionaries and eminent divines who have taken a prominent part in the anti-opium movement are afflicted in their field of morals by the same persistent delusion as that which commonly afflicts reformers in the field of political economics. "They are all pervaded," as Spencer says, "by the conviction, now definitely expressed and now taken as a self evident truth, that there needs but this kind of instruction or that kind of discipline, this mode of repression or that system of culture, to bring society into a very much better state." Misled by laudable enthusiasms, blinded by benevolent hypotheses, it is a characteristic of the advocates of this good cause, that they are generally predisposed to ignore or to misinterpret those facts of the situation which militate against their own conclusions. Influenced by these enthusiasms, they fail to take into account, not only the structural character of the Chinese race in particular, but the inherent weaknesses of humanity in general.

If we turn to the history of the agitation against the Indian opium trade, we find that amongst the arguments most frequently advanced, two have been most persistent; first, the argument that Great Britain has forced the Indian trade upon China at the cannon's mouth, and secondly, that the recent anti-opium legislation introduced by the Chinese government opens up a new and particularly promising vision of reform. As regards the first of these two, the fallacy of the cannon's mouth line of argument has been so

frequently demonstrated by unbiased and competent writers that the facts are easily available. Nevertheless, it continues to figure prominently in all the activities of the anti-opium societies and is apparently not to be upset by any reiteration of historical fact. To give only one recent instance, let me quote to you from a work published a month ago, *Men and Manners of Modern China* by Dr. Macgowan.

Seventy years ago [he says] a great western power forced on China an opium treaty at the mouth of the cannon. Since then not a dead hand but a mailed fist has been held up threateningly to prevent its being evaded. Her merchants have carried on the opium traffic and her warships have patrolled the eastern seas, to see that they are not defrauded of their rights.

The years dragged slowly on for China, and during these opium was slowly weaving its web over the land, and its black fingers were fastening themselves round the hearts of countless thousands, and homes were being desolated by a curse which the government might never try to remove, for the iron fist was always on guard.

And then the great miracle took place. The passion that had been burning in the hearts of the best men in the country blazed forth with a mighty fire. The conqueror was appealed to some five years ago or so, and slowly the mailed arm was dropped.

The effect of well-meant but wholly inaccurate statements of this sort has been clearly reflected in the attitude of many Chinese promoters of the anti-opium movement and has resulted in diverting the attention of many from the real and vital issues of that question to the actually subordinate question of the Indian trade. This attitude of the Chinese was most remarkably demonstrated at the Hague Conference which took place at the close of last year. I was present, on behalf of the *London Times*, on that occasion and was struck by the fact that, although at this time the cultivation of the poppy was being rapidly reintroduced into many provinces in China, the attitude of the Chinese delegates was one of virtuous condescension and high moral superiority, so much so, that they were brought to book and rebuked on more than one occasion. At the end of 1910 when, as a result of a wave of public enthusiasm and concerted efforts, sincerely backed by the Manchu government, opium cultivation had been reduced by something approximating to twenty-five per cent of the area under poppy, the

adoption by the Chinese delegates of an attitude of moral superiority might have been condoned; but in 1911, with cultivation again in full swing it was certainly indefensible. The complete abolition line of argument, like the cannon's mouth theory, is based upon fallacies and on untruths easily disprovable. To refute the cannon's mouth legend, for instance, I may observe that amongst the events which led up to the treaty of Nanking in 1842, opium was only one factor and that the question settled by that treaty was not the question of the importation of opium (or other goods) at Canton, but the right of foreign envoys to treat directly with the Chinese government.

But be this as it may, the Indian opium trade may now be regarded as dead, England's present attitude in the matter amounting to recognition of the fact that the game is not worth the scandal, and that the abolition of a trade in which only a limited number of British merchants and bankers and a few millions of Indian agriculturists are concerned, will be politically and economically to the advantage of the British Empire, quite apart from all moral considerations. Economically, the substitution of grain cultivation for opium in India must in the end be productive of good, for the enormous increase of population in that country is already producing serious social and economic difficulties and it must be obvious that every field taken from opium and given to the production of grain will eventually afford a measure of relief to the pressing problem of the world's food supply. On the other hand, however, it must be evident that, now that as China resumes the cultivation of opium upon a large scale, the difficulties of the food supply problem in China are likely to be aggravated in the near future.

In order to gauge the future action of the Chinese Government and its people in regard to this question of opium, it is necessary before all to consider the question of the permanent sincerity of the governing class. At the Shang-Hai Conference in 1909, it was recorded as the unanimous opinion of the International delegates that they believed in the "unswerving sincerity" of the Chinese government.

The practicability of abolishing, not only the importation of the foreign drug, but the cultivation of all native opium, was from the first a question entirely dependent upon this matter of sincerity. By the opium edicts of 1906, drastic measures were introduced which, in the opinion of many observers on the spot, were construed as evidence of new and sincere intentions on the part of the Chinese government. Nevertheless, the whole history and record of that government precludes belief in the sincerity of the movement and on the other hand, contains evidence of a persistent and deliberate intention on the part of the mandarin class (as distinct from the earnest reformers) to take advantage of the enthusiastic public opinion amongst the Chinese and of the sympathy of foreign nations, to evolve, for its own ultimate benefit, a system of monopolies in the native trade, coincident with the abolition of the importation of Indian opium. That this has been the traditional policy of the Chinese government really requires but little proof; but I may cite as one remarkable piece of evidence the opinion recorded as far back as 1875, by Johannes von Gumpach. He wrote:

If the British government were to listen to the Tsungli Yamen's insidious arguments, supported though they be by ill-directed missionary zeal, and yield to the Yamen's intimidations by consenting to the prohibition of poppy culture in India, it would after all only sacrifice the legitimate interests of British commerce and the Indian industry and to what end? To the end that the government of China might, under the shading mask of its impotence, encourage the cultivation of the poppy at home; stealthily and gradually add to its salt monopoly that of the manufacture and sale of opium, and impose upon the people a deleterious drug, while excluding from the country a superior preparation.

If we turn now to the attitude of Young China toward the opium question, we find in the opinion of most observers and notably of the missionary bodies, between the years 1907 and 1910, a general consensus of opinion that a new spirit had been created, bringing with it the sure promise of better things and good hopes of the complete eradication of opium smoking throughout the country. Many observers on the spot, while accepting the opium edicts as evidence of

sincerity, still retained doubts as to the practicability of the measures proposed by the edicts of 1906. I myself was at Peking at that time and in frequent communication with Tang Shao-yi, the initiator of the opium abolition edicts and the most prominent of all the reformers. I shared with others the belief in the sincerity of the originators of this movement at the beginning, but as time went on, I was reluctantly compelled to modify my faith in that sincerity by reason of the indisputable evidence of certain facts which came to my own knowledge. For instance, one of the regulations by which the abolition of opium was to be secured within a period of ten years was that which prohibited the sale of any anti-opium remedies containing forms of opium, such as morphia pills. The manufacture and sale of pills, containing opium in any form was forbidden under strict penalties; this measure was obviously necessary if the abolition of the opium pipe was not to be replaced by something infinitely worse. At the beginning of 1907, it came to the knowledge of several observers of the movement in Peking and especially of the British Legation, which was naturally following the results of the edicts with great interest, that a large number of brands of so-called anti-opium pills was being manufactured and sold. Amongst them were many which after being analyzed in London, were found to contain a very large percentage of morphia. One pill was being sold at Peking and Tientsin under Government auspices; it was manufactured upon the prescription of a foreign-educated Chinese doctor, a Cantonese, nearly related by marriage to Mr. Tang Shao-yi. Upon ascertaining the facts, I called upon Mr. Tang and pointed out the foredoomed futility of opium regulations which could be violated in this way and the very bad impression which must be created by the fact that a person so closely related to himself should thus be making profit out of the illegal sale of these dangerous pills. No action was taken in the matter however and to this day the sale of anti-opium pills containing morphia continues practically unchecked in most parts of China, and the illicit morphia trade brings large profits to British manufacturers of the drug. A second disquieting incident occurred when the

American government, actuated by a laudable desire to assist the Chinese in their work of opium abolition, gave encouragement and letters of introduction to the Chinese authorities to an expert in the cure of drug habitués, Mr. C. B. Towns of New York. Mr. Towns came to Peking and asked to be allowed to cure Chinese opium smokers by a process of his own which he guaranteed to be effective within a reasonably short period of time. In order to test by practical experiments the nature and results of his treatment, I arranged, in consultation with the doctor of the British Legation to watch the cure in the case of a dozen confirmed opium smokers who would submit to the test. These men, all personally known to me, were treated for four days by the Towns method and after it they were certainly cured for the time being of any desire to smoke opium. For six months afterwards, during which time their movements were watched, they still remained free from the vice. Nevertheless, in spite of these and other successful experiments with private individual Chinese, no attempt was made to encourage the introduction of Mr. Towns's treatment on any wide scale and as a matter of fact, his own repeated attempts to secure premises for a hospital in Tien-Tsin city were blocked by the opposition of local Chinese officials. I mention these two cases as evidence of the traditional Mandarin attitude, many more instances of which might be cited, which effectively preclude any robust faith in the sincerity of the leaders of Young China in the national anti-opium movement.

The three years of experiment and test which, under the British opium agreement of 1907, were to demonstrate the sincerity and the ability of the Chinese government in the matter of opium abolition resulted, as I have said, in a reduction of about 25 per cent in the total cultivation of the poppy throughout the provinces. This result was very largely due to the fact that the Manchu government, regarding opium abolition as one of the things upon which Young China was keenly determined, and fearing to increase the unrest and disloyalty of the southern provinces, lent the whole weight of its authority to the movement for suppressing poppy cul-

tivation. Sir Alexander Hosie, reporting to the British government on the progress made in the suppression of cultivation in the various provinces, stated that the farmers themselves had accepted serious losses and given up planting the poppy for three causes. First, belief in the sincerity of the government intentions. This took some time to establish, but in 1910, it was widespread. Second, local influence of the *literati* and gentry, exercised in support of the government's programme. Third, the popular recognition of the social and economic evils arising from the opium habit. There is no doubt that the good will shown by the Manchu government in this matter was of very powerful assistance to the cause which the opium reformers had at heart, and that, without it, the expression of public opinion could not have produced any such good results as were actually attained in the summer of 1910. At this stage, however, Young China, carried away by its own enthusiasms and by its impatience to achieve still more rapid results, began to agitate for the complete abolition of the Indian trade as the most important thing to be secured. At the same time, it took the question out of the plane of philanthropy and morality into that of politics. The manner in which the question was discussed by the provincial assemblies afforded conspicuous proof of the change which had taken place. The violent agitation which was commenced in England and in China at this date for the immediate abolition of the Indian trade, eventually led the British government to agree to the convention which was concluded in Peking in May, 1911. By virtue of this new treaty, a heavy additional duty was placed upon the Indian drug and it was at the same time agreed, that any province in China which was able to show a "clean slate," that is to say, to prove that it had completely abolished opium cultivation within its own borders, should, *ipso facto*, be entitled to exclude all further importations of the Indian drug. By this eminently fair arrangement, it was left for each province to make good its own pledges and to give immediate effect to the reforms for which they professed to be anxious. Nevertheless, at this time, while the Cantonese were agitating in all parts of the country and

denouncing the British government for "forcing Indian opium upon China," the lamentable fact was becoming apparent that, in those very provinces where Young China had been most active in its propaganda, the treaty with Great Britain was being violated and native opium was being cultivated for the pecuniary benefit of the local officials. At the present day, whilst the leaders of the republic, Sun Yat Sen and Li Yuan Hung, continue to press for the abrogation of the treaty of May, 1911, and to demand that no more shipments of Indian opium shall henceforth be made, they remain curiously indifferent to the fact that the cultivation of native opium has been resumed on an unprecedentedly large scale. Even in those provinces of Shensi and Szechuen which in 1910 had been reported clear of opium cultivation, it is now unfortunately true that the poppy is grown in large quantities. More than this, there is every evidence of a widespread intention in many provinces to establish official monopolies for the control of the trade in Chinese opium. The province of Chekiang, for instance, which has for sometime past been illegally and arbitrarily prohibiting all movements of Indian opium within its borders on grounds of high morality, and appealing to the moral dignity and conscience of Great Britain to support it in this line of action, has, at the same time, gathered a large harvest of opium, cultivated up to the very walls of the prefectual city. In the provinces of Canton, Yünnan and Kiangsi, the republican authorities have officially organized local monopolies for the control and sale of Chinese opium.

The effect on trade and politics of the violation of treaties, such as have recently been manifested by the republican authorities in several provinces, cannot fail to create an exceedingly bad impression abroad and thus to place further obstacles in the way of the progress and prosperity of the Chinese people. If we consider only the disorganization of trade and finances which must arise from the illegal restrictions placed by the Shanghai and Chekiang officials on the importation of Indian opium, it is evident that, where a cargo to the value of about six millions sterling is arbitrarily held up and prevented from entering into consumption, the

consequences cannot be negligible, for the Indian opium trade, like other branches of commerce in the Far East, is conducted on credit handled by native and foreign banks, and any disorganization of that credit must inevitably react far and wide, to the general disturbance of the economic situation and to the detriment of the country's future trade.

Looking at the question from another point of view; that is to say, considering it in its political aspect, the cessation of the Indian opium trade, unaccompanied by cessation of the production of the native drug, must tend to increase and accelerate the movement, already marked throughout China, towards provincial autonomy. The Import duties heretofore levied on the Indian drug formed an important item in the central government's budget of revenue. These will now be cut off, and on the other hand the provinces, under their local monopolies, will collect large sums at the disposal of the local bureaus for provincial purposes. That is to say, at a time when all British and American opinion concurs in the urgent necessity for the creation and maintenance of a strong central government, the results of the anti-opium movement, as at present indicated, will aid in placing increased revenues at the disposal of the provinces and reduce Peking's control over what were national funds.

Finally, the Chinese government's real or professed inability to control the provinces, as regards observance of the British treaty of May, 1911, cannot fail to produce results seriously prejudicial to China's credit abroad and ultimately to her borrowing capacity; for, as has been pointed out by competent critics, if China cannot prevent the maritime province of Chekiang from defying the law and from violating the central government's obligations under the treaty referred to, it is not likely that the government will be able hereafter to exercise that control of *Lekin* or supervision of the salt gabelle, which it is understood, are to form the collateral security of future loans.

If we turn now to a brief consideration of the moral aspect of the opium smoking question, it is impossible to avoid introducing the commonplace comparison or analogy between the smoking of opium by the Chinese and the con-

sumption of alcohol in European countries. The uses and abuses of opium are undoubtedly very similar in their causes and effects to those with which we are familiar in the case of alcoholic drinks. That the excessive use of opium is a vicious and degrading habit, none will deny but the actual facts are that the Chinaman's tendency to consume opium in excess have been very widely exaggerated and generally distorted. Examining the facts in the light of such dispassionate and methodical inquiry as is available, we find, in the report of the Straits Settlements Opium Commission of 1907-08, evidence of a very detailed kind which appear to afford ample justification for that Commission's conclusion that "The opium habit is comparable to the European's use of alcohol and tobacco and that it must be regarded as the expression among the Chinese of the universal tendency to some form of indulgence." In other words, if we accept this conclusion even in a limited sense and with mental reservations, it seems to me an imperative and inevitable conclusion, from all European experience, that a reasonable recognition of the limitations of human nature and human weaknesses will be more conducive in the long run to the ends of public morality, than the attempt to give effect to the impossible idea of complete abolition of opium cultivation or any other doctrine of the extremists.

The Straits Settlements report, above referred to, embodies a systematic attempt to render a complete and impartial account of the question of opium smoking, and its conclusions emphasize the important fact, which the anti-opium societies have generally ignored, that the vast majority of Chinese opium smokers are habitually moderate consumers. Says this report:

The evils arising from the use of opium, were made the subject of specific inquiry from nearly every witness, and medical witnesses were practically unanimous, with the exception of those who held views strongly opposed to opium, that opium smoking in moderation was relatively harmless. Even if carried to excess, no organic change in the body could be detected, the results being chiefly functional evils. It was also found, as would be the case with alcohol, impossible to lay down a standard consumption which could be regarded as use in moderation or use in excess, owing to the varying physiques and constitutions of smokers.

Reporting to the House of Commons in the year 1872, the opinion of a large number of medical men was recorded: "That there is a certain aptitude in the stimulant of opium to the circumstances of the Chinese people, and that the universal use of the opium pipe among the Chinese must certainly be owing to some peculiarity of their mental and nervous constitution." That this weakness, or form of indulgence, is peculiarly indicated by the physical and nervous systems of the Chinese race is proved by the fact that the Thibetan, Mohammedan and Mongolian inhabitants of Kan Suh and other centers of opium cultivation are practically immune.

The tendency to smoke opium which the Chinaman carries about with him to all parts of the world, is logically and naturally comparable with the Anglo-Saxon's tendency or predilection towards alcoholic stimulants. The comparison is a commonplace one, I admit, and two blacks do not make a white, but many years ago a dispassionate and thoroughly competent observer of the opium question, Mr. Meadows, observed that, "Although the substances are different, I can see no difference at all as to the morality of producing, selling and consuming them, while the only difference I can observe in the consequences of consumption is, that the opium smoker is not so violent, so maudlin or so disgusting as the drunkard."

The opium problem appears to reduce itself naturally under three heads. *First:* Is opium necessary to the Chinese, as alcohol is to the European? On this point the evidence of the Straits Settlements Opium Commission appears to be conclusive, and there can be no doubt that so long as opium continues to be produced and available, either by legitimate trade or by smuggling, the Chinese people will continue to smoke it.

Second: Is the total abolition of opium smoking and opium cultivation possible? In the Straits Settlements report it was recorded as a generally recognized truth that "Without an international agreement to stop the growth of the poppy, the success of any prohibitive legislation would be highly problematical." At the International Conference held at

The Hague last January, the resolutions dealing with the abolition of the opium traffic were passed upon the tacit assumption that China would continue to justify Europe's faith in her "unswerving sincerity," and in her ability to put down opium cultivation; but it was unanimously admitted and agreed that the idea of any international agreement or legislation, to control and prevent the cultivation of the poppy throughout the world, was utterly impracticable and visionary. Even the measures proposed by the American delegates for the control of the movement and sale of opium, and the British suggestions for the control of the trade in morphine, cocaine and other drugs by means of an international agreement and pharmacy laws, were regarded by the majority of the delegates as counsels of perfection, Utopian schemes, suitable for presentation at The Hague but unattainable in practice. As regards any idea of an international self-denying ordinance to remedy the production of the poppy, Turkey, one of the chief producers, declined even to be represented at the Conference, and the attitude of other powers left no doubt as to the futility of the suggestion. But even assuming, for purposes of argument, that the total abolition of opium cultivation were possible, there remains the third aspect of the problem, i.e., once opium smoking has been eradicated, by what means would it be possible to prevent a rapid increase of the more dangerous morphia habit and the adoption of alcohol as a form of stimulant by the Chinese people? Personally, I consider that all the evidence goes to show that a predisposition to opium in one form or another is indicated by the physical and nervous constitution of the Chinese as a race, and I am not therefore inclined to attach great importance to the opinions of those who, like Sir Frank Swettenham, think that alcohol is likely to take the place of opium wherever opium is unobtainable. But the dangers arising from morphine as a substitute for opium are sufficiently real and immediate to have engaged the serious attention of philanthropists and medical missionaries in China and abroad. They formed the subject of special resolutions at The Hague Conference and a vast amount of interesting information was

submitted and recorded on the subject. Without going into details it may be said that, since the morphia duty was increased in China after 1906, the smuggling of this dangerous drug has increased by leaps and bounds, and doctors all over China now testify that many opium-smokers have taken to morphia, making the last state worse than the first. China proposed to regulate the morphine trade by the inauguration of pharmacy laws applicable throughout the Empire under official supervision, but I need hardly say that for many years to come, this proposal, like that of the abolition of opium cultivation, must remain an unattainable ideal. No such laws could possibly be framed or enforced under existing conditions.

To sum up: The futility of legislation and of philanthropic attempts to attain the complete abolition of opium cultivation and opium smoking in China must be obvious to every unbiased observer of the facts. Nevertheless, I hold that if, instead of discussing unpractical schemes, the activities of philanthropists and missionaries could henceforth be directed towards the introduction of practical restrictive legislation and regulation of the opium traffic, much good might be done in China, just as in Great Britain education, philanthropy and the moral effect of the temperance movement have greatly reduced the national tendency to drunkenness within the last half century. There undoubtedly exists in China a strong force of public opinion directed against the excessive use of opium.

By practical legislation, such as that which in Scandinavia has been adopted with such excellent results under the Gothenburg system, and by means of the education of public opinion, progress can and will no doubt be made. But there can be no permanently beneficial results from impulsive and Quixotic attempts to secure the root and branch elimination of a firmly established national propensity.